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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to generate a theory of role personalization grounded in data obtained from beginning secondary teachers. Role personalization is defined as the way beginning teachers adapt the teacher role to meet their own needs, while at the same time being socialized into the role demanded by others. Ten beginning secondary teachers participated in the study during their first and third years of teaching. Four major motivating needs were expressed by teachers entering their first year of teaching: the needs for respect, liking, belonging, and sense of competence. Three years later they still focused on these four major needs, but the need for respect had less salience. A fifth need, for variety, emerged after three years of teaching. The teachers' concept of themselves, the role ideal, problems, and perceptions of others changed very little from the first to the third year, although perceptions of their own competence were strengthened. The teachers' needs-disposition permeated their perceptions of role, self, problems, and others, which, in turn, affected the behaviors they chose in enacting the role of teacher. Early in their role adoption as teachers they sought to present themselves as competent and like their ideal, by achieving control of students and not asking for help from peers. Later they sought to present themselves in a manner that would gain student affection. By the third year, in keeping with their growing need for variety, they began to present themselves as innovative and willing to try new things. (JD)

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A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF THE ROLE PERSONALIZATION OF BEGINNING SECONDARY TEACHERS

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The role assumption of beginning teachers has received limited attention from educational researchers (Becker, 1952; Eddy; 1969; Lortie, 1966). Instead the results of teacher role transition studies based on data from student teachers have been generalized to the new teacher. Such generalizations disregard the unique nature of the beginning teachers role assumption. The purpose of this study was to generate a theory of role personalization grounded in data obtained from beginning secondary teachers. Role personalization is defined here as the way beginning teachers adapt the teacher role to meet their own needs, while at the same time being socialized to the role demanded by others (Getzels and Thelen, 1960).

In education and education-related fields, authors have failed to present substantive theories of the process of teacher development. Waller's classic work (1961), originally written in 1932, stood for years as the definitive study of the sociology of teaching, not necessarily because of its validity, but primarily because no one ventured alternatives.

More recently educators have advanced arguments on the most influential reference groups in the socialization of new teachers. Research

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was presented stressing the contribution of early childhood role models (Wright and Sherman, 1963), teacher preparation programs (Iannacconne, 1963), cultural and institutional milieux (Horowitz, 1968), school norm groups (Joyce, 1963; Walberg, 1968), and students (Jackson, 1956). However, no single source of socialization has been shown to have a decisive effect on role choice or role enactment for all teachers.

Research has also been concerned with the problems and fears of new teachers (Hermanowitz, 1966; Fuchs, 1969), their role conflicts (Braga, 1972), and their attitude changes (Ayers, 1972). However, these studies dealing with socializing influences and personality variables have not yielded any comprehensive theory of teachers' adaptive behaviors. Specifically, an integrated model of role personalization is needed.

METHOD

A grounded theory research procedure, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was utilized to gather and analyze data for hypothesis generation on teacher role personalization. Data were gathered from interviews, observations, and written statements of concern obtained from beginning secondary teachers. They were then analyzed using a comparative analysis technique by which the information was coded and arranged into categories, and further subdivided into properties. Tentative hypotheses were developed on the basis of the categories and their properties. These hypotheses were then used to direct further interviews and observations. Alternate data gathering and analysis phases, carried on over a three-year period, led to the generation of a substantive theory of the role personalization of beginning teachers. With refinement and expansion, this

substantive theory based on data from a closely defined situation should lead to the development of a formal theory of role personalization.

DATA SOURCE

Ten beginning secondary teachers in a Southwestern metropolitan school district participated in the study during their first and third year of teaching. Selected on the assumption that the differences among the participants would facilitate the discovery of theoretical categories, properties, and interrelationships (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the teachers varied in age, sex, teaching area, background, and school environment. All teachers voluntarily participated.

RESULTS

Three interrelated categories of teacher personalization emerged from the data: needs, perceptions, and behaviors. It was determined that four specific needs are most salient during early role transition. These basic needs were in turn proposed to affect the teachers perceptions of self, the role ideal, role-related problems, and context-specific persons. Finally it was submitted that perceptions influenced the teachers' presentation of self, problem responses, and relations with others.

Teacher Needs

Four major motivating needs were verbalized by the teachers of this study upon first entering the new occupational role. Not surprisingly, the teachers revealed the need for respect, liking, and belonging, as well as a pervasive need for a sense of competence. This fourth need for a sense of competence is one that is supported by the fulfillment of the

first three needs, but is not limited to them. It is a self-judged state of fitness, capability, or capacity to carry on transactions with the environment, and results in the individual's self maintenance and growth (White, 1963, p. 73). Three years later the teachers still focused on these four major needs, but the need for respect had less salience. Liking, belonging, and a sense of competence were still apparent needs of the teachers from their comments about the ideal teacher, the rewards of the job, and their goals. A fifth need for variety, however, had appeared in the teachers remarks. As the novelty of the new job decreases third year teachers must often purposely create the situations they need to maintain interest. Linton mentions this need for relief from boredom (1955) as a primary motivator of human behavior.

Teacher Perceptions

The teachers' concept of self, the role ideal, problems, and perceptions of others formed the major divisions of the perceptions category. Few changes were exhibited in perceptions from the first year to the third. As one might expect, the teachers did change in their perceptions of their own competence, but they tended to view the ideal teacher and the problems of teaching much as they had upon entry.

Perception elements. The ideal teacher, described in the early sessions in traits (respected, knowledgeable, fair) was more often described in the first year-end session through behaviors. At the end of the third year, behavior descriptions were still the primary mode of ideal teacher delineation. A descriptive mode which focused on results, or "what the students need," was found in only one instance.

Those teachers who were initially characterized by either a tendency to deny or to affirm the presence of problems were still prone to see situations from the same orientation. They were also likely to exhibit the same optimism or pessimism in problem solution which they had exhibited earlier, and the same mode of cooperative or competitive solution to the problems.

The teachers began their first year frequently perceiving themselves as the source of their problems, though some blamed others, and some blamed the situation. By the end of the first year, self blame had moderated and the teachers were sharing the blame. After three years most teachers (eight of ten) continued to share the blame with others and the situation. Those who persisted in blaming themselves were the ones who also described the greatest number of anxiety symptoms (headaches, cramps, nightmares, sleeplessness).

The teachers' perceptions of others was a distinct variable among the teachers. Though most teachers acknowledged the importance of their relations with the general student population, each teacher showed a distinct pattern of relating to the six reference groups with whom they came in touch as a teacher. The teachers exhibited focus on three orientations, each presented in both a specialized and a broad reference group. A client orientation was observed in a student special interest group focus, and a general student focus. A peer orientation appeared in a special subject colleague group focus and a general local faculty group. The authority oriented teacher attended to either administrators or students' parents. Teachers who were more anxious and self-doubting focused on the specialized groups. As competence increased and

difficulties decreased during the first year the teachers came to relate more intensely with the universal groups, shifting to more general student and peer foci. This trend continued through the third year. (See Figure 1.)

Teacher Personalizing Behaviors

The early behaviors of teachers fell into three categories: (a) presentation of self, (b) problem responses, and (c) relations with others. These behaviors were mediated by the actual contexts in which the teachers enacted the role of teacher, that is, the people, places, and problems which surrounded their own need fulfilling behavior.

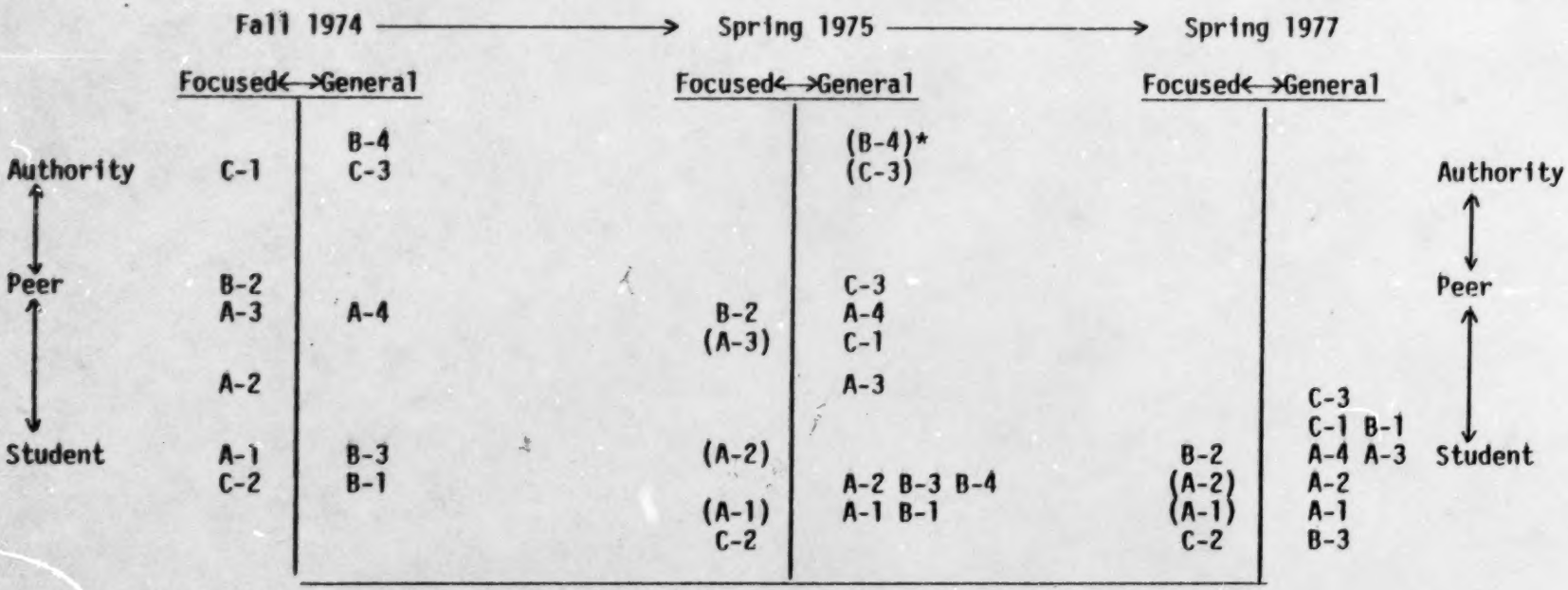
Behavior elements. Early in their role adoption the teachers sought to present themselves as competent and like their ideal, by achieving control of students (respect), and by not asking for help from peers. Later they sought to present themselves in a manner which would gain student affection (liking). By the third year, in keeping with their growing need for variety, they began to present themselves as innovative and willing to try new things.

Throughout the three year period the teachers exhibited problem coping patterns characterized either by a tendency to seek the presence and comfort of others, or the solitude to work out problems independently. Most teachers preferred the comfort of others, but few found any real help forthcoming from administrators, peers, or family and friends.

Once the teachers had chosen to deal with problems individually or with the aid of others, they brought into action a number of adjustive responses to the problems. In addition to selective awareness the

FIGURE 1

Shifts in Reference Group Focus



* Even though they have transferred their primary focus to another reference group, those teachers identified in parentheses still maintained a fairly strong identification with original reference focus.

teachers utilized means-end symbolization, detachment, and sensitivity as defensive or coping behaviors to deal with problem situations.

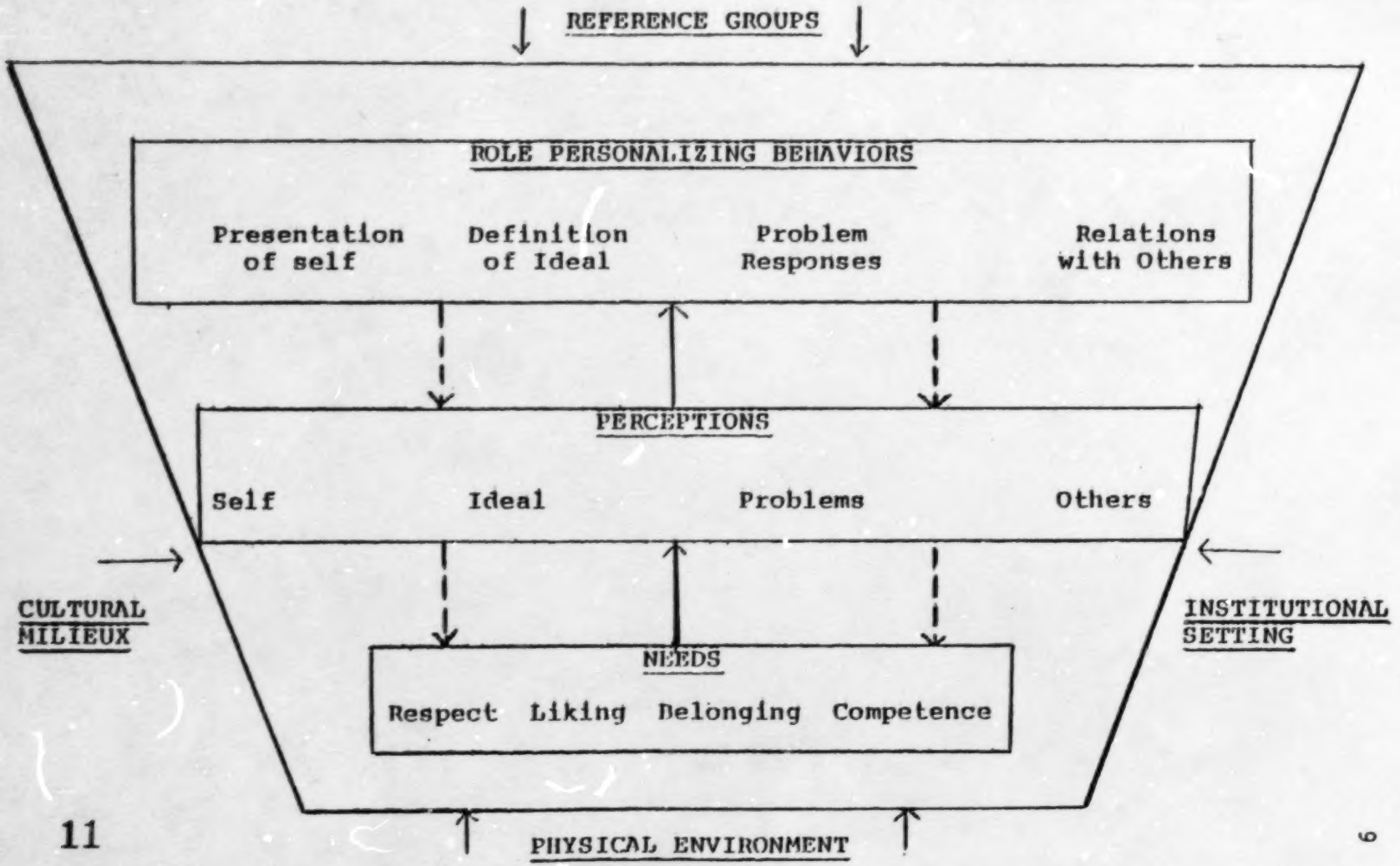
New teachers do not present themselves to an undifferentiated mass. They relate to the six reference groups mentioned earlier in order to receive from them fulfillment of those needs which only other people can provide. The status of teacher requires that one interact with several groups. However, the group or groups one chooses as most important to fulfillment of needs varies from person to person based on several factors, among them the security offered by the group, the teachers own self-concept, role ideal concept, and past and present relationships with others. Teachers seek relationships with specific groups in order to be like the ideal teacher and prove themselves competent in their own eyes. The environment in which the teacher works also may serve to channel focus to a particular group which might, under other circumstances, be less appealing to the teacher.

Generation of Interrelational Model

Review of the three categories of hypotheses generated from the data indicated that the category relations could be schematized in a hierarchical fashion shown in Figure 2. The needs of the teachers form the first level of the model. The second level is composed of the teachers' perceptions, and the third level includes the teacher role personalizing behaviors. Thus, the teachers' needs-disposition permeates their perceptions of role, self, problems, and others, which, in turn, affect the behaviors they will consciously and unconsciously choose in enacting the role of teacher. All this proceeds within specific, yet changing

FIGURE 2

Role Personalization Hierarchy Within
the Socialization Context



environments of people, objects, and places. Each unique environment affects the role personalization of the teachers within it. No role is enacted in a vacuum.

The components of the levels are interrelated in various patterns, some more salient from observations than others. It is apparent, for example, that the need for competence is closely related to the perceptions of self. Less obvious, but also present, is the relation between the need for competence, perception of the ideal, and presentation of self. One can trace the needs of the teachers through their perceptions of problems to their problem responses and, in the same manner, one can follow the needs through the perceptions of others to the reference group relations of each teacher.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

A theory of role personalization which accurately accounts for the relational patterns of teacher needs, perceptions, and behaviors can serve as a basis for interpreting information gathered on teacher role entry. These interpretations may then serve a predictive function and allow supervisors and peers to assist the teacher more effectively through the role transition. Effective assistance during this critical period would make the role transition of the beginning teacher less stressful and insure greater probability of establishment of an effective teaching style.

In addition to the explanation, prediction, and control of the role personalization of teachers during the role transition, this substantive theory can be utilized in the development of more inclusive formal theory and in the verification of related theories arrived at through

logico-deductive methods. One might find that, having studied the role personalization of beginning teachers, additional studies of the same phenomena in other occupational role transitions would provide grounding for a more universally applicable theory of role personalization. Large corporations, the military, and governmental offices are but a few of the occupational areas where lack of a thorough understanding of personalization during role transition could have effects on the lives of many.

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